



Review Officer (Bexley)  
 LGBCE 14th floor,  
 Millbank Tower  
 London  
 SW1P 4QP

2<sup>nd</sup> April 2016

### **Re: London Borough of Bexley – Local Government Boundary Review**

Please find the enclosed information in response to the consultation into the future local government boundaries in the London Borough of Bexley.

### **Our organisation**

The Belvedere Community Forum was set up the London Borough of Bexley in 1999 and formally constituted in 2000. We have been registered as a charity with the Charity Commission since 2005 and as a company with Companies House since 2014.

Belvedere is a district within the northern part of the London Borough of Bexley. Our constitutional area of benefit covers all of the DA17 area along with a very small part of the DA8, DA18 and SE2 areas. The Belvedere Community Forum gives the community a voice to access decision-making processes that affect them. The Community Forum is responsive to local issues and local needs.

We aim to

- ❖ Give local people a voice in the development of their area.
- ❖ Promote the principle of partnership as the best way of making change happen for the benefit of all.
- ❖ Work with the Council to obtain sustainable development.
- ❖ Explore new ideas, initiatives and projects
- ❖ Act as a focal point enabling the sharing of ideas and as a major resource and source of information on funding and regeneration issues.
- ❖ Organise community events within the DA17 area.

Anyone who is a resident in the postal area of Belvedere, local organisations, local businesses and local councillors are eligible to be members of the Forum.

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 c/o: Belvedere Community Centre, Mitchell Close, Belvedere, DA17 6AA; Tel: 020 8311 5550

[www.thisisbelvedere.org.uk](http://www.thisisbelvedere.org.uk) [belvedereforum@virginmedia.com](mailto:belvedereforum@virginmedia.com) ; @belvedereforum

**Registered Charity Number: 1116584; Company Number: 09058625**

We hold at least three public consultation meetings each year to inform and gather the opinions of local residents. While we realise that a hill runs through our community we ensure that meetings are held either at Belvedere Baptist Church, Nuxley Road or Belvedere Community Centre, Mitchell Close in order to ensure that residents at either end of Belvedere have access to meetings. However, in our experience, the vast majority of attendees attend our meetings at both venues, as they are committed to the improvement of the overall Belvedere community.

In addition, we hold a number of annual community events including a children's party, musical event, children's Halloween party and community events at Christmas.

We also help to fund a twice weekly keep fit club for over 50s and in 2014 signed a 25-year lease to run Belvedere Community Centre in Mitchell Close to help develop activities for local people and support community cohesion.

Our organisation employs staff to run Belvedere Community Centre and is run by a board of twelve directors made up of local residents, councillors, traders and users of Belvedere Community Centre.

### **Our historic relationship**

We acknowledge that given the electorate within our constitutional area and within Belvedere as a whole, that it is not possible to create a Belvedere ward which encompasses the entire Belvedere community.

At the time of our formation, Belvedere fell into four three-member council wards – Belvedere, Bostall, Erith and Northumberland Heath. Following the last local government boundary changes in 2002, Belvedere has again fallen into four three-member council wards – Belvedere, Erith, Lesnes Abbey and Northumberland Heath.

Under both sets of boundaries at least 60% of our constitutional area has fallen into one ward called Belvedere. The main benefit this has supplied is that the two main areas of community focus – the Picardy Street/Station Road area and Albert Road/Nuxley Road area have fallen into the same ward.

As a result, the majority of our focus on community issues has allowed us to work with one set of three councillors in one ward. It has ensured that the majority of issues that are raised with us or that we engage on, whether they involve Belvedere Industrial area, Belvedere Station, Belvedere Community Centre, the ASDA and B&Q planning applications, Belvedere Recreation Ground North/Belvedere Splash Park, Belvedere Recreation Ground South, Belvedere Library, Belvedere Pop in Parlour and Belvedere Village are within one ward. At present, we have close contact with the Belvedere councillors, who actively support our organisation, attend our public meetings and community events.

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At present, we have little contact with the Erith councillors, although this should not be implied as a criticism of them as they do on occasion attend our public meetings and community events. A small part of Belvedere around the Erith Road and Lower Road areas falls into this ward. Therefore, with the exception of Franks Park, we have little engagement with the council on areas in this ward.

At present, we have close contact with the Lesnes Abbey councillors, who actively support our organisation, attend our public meetings and community events. Parts of Belvedere around the Abbey Road and Bedonwell Road areas falls into this ward. Therefore, the areas around Bedonwell School and Lesnes Abbey fall into this ward resulting in additional engagement regarding this ward and in particular the regeneration of Lesnes Abbey.

At present, we have little contact with the Northumberland Heath councillors, although this should not be implied as a criticism of them as they do on occasion attend our public meetings. A small part of Belvedere around the Parsonage Manorway area falls into this ward. Therefore, with the exception of Stream Way, we have little engagement with the council on areas in this ward.

### **Your proposals**

We note that under your proposed boundaries that Belvedere would continue to fall into four wards, a one-member Belvedere Village ward, a three-member Bostall ward, a two-member Lower Belvedere ward and a three-member Northumberland Heath ward.

The proposed Belvedere Village ward would be formed predominantly from an area currently within Belvedere ward along with a small part of the current Erith ward.

The proposed Bostall ward would be formed from areas currently within Belvedere, Brampton, Lesnes Abbey, Northumberland Heath and St Michael's wards.

The proposed Lower Belvedere ward would be formed from areas currently within Belvedere, Erith and Lesnes Abbey wards.

The proposed Northumberland Heath ward would be formed from areas currently within Colyers, Erith and Northumberland Heath wards.

The major benefit of the new proposals for us is that it reduces the number of councillors within our constitutional area from twelve to nine, possibly lessening our workload as we would have regular contact with nine rather than twelve councillors. Under the proposals, the majority of our contact would still also be with three councillors. Nevertheless, there may be advantages to the wider Belvedere area of having many council members covering it as there are more people to represent our needs at the council. However, some of the board members commented that the opportunity has not been taken to reduce the number of wards within our constitutional area from four to three, which appears possible as is addressed below.

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## Concerns, comments & opinions raised with us

At our last public meeting held on 3<sup>rd</sup> March 2016, a resident who regularly attends our meetings voiced her objections to the proposals. The resident in question lives in the proposed Lower Belvedere ward and felt “all the council services she uses” would be in the proposed Belvedere Village ward. She went onto query why the two proposed wards of Belvedere Village (one councillor) and Lower Belvedere (two councillors), could not be combined to be represented by three councillors in a combined ward.

As this issue was raised towards the end of a busy agenda, it was agreed that the issue would be discussed further at our board meeting held on 29<sup>th</sup> March 2016. This letter is being sent as a result of that discussion.

It was accepted during this discussion, that it would not be possible to suggest major re-drawings of the boundaries. Issues which were raised included whether roads in the south of Belvedere fell naturally into a ward with areas such as Brampton Road and Hadlow Road in the proposed Bostall ward, which don't appear to have close community links. There was however no settled view of our board on this issue and it was agreed that it would be too complex to try and substantially re-draw boundaries.

The majority of our discussion focussed on the proposals regarding the one-member Belvedere Village and two-member Lower Belvedere wards. The issues raised by board members included the following:

- The view that the Picardy Street/Station Road area and Albert Road/Nuxley Road area both form integral parts of our community as local residents use both the facilities in Belvedere Village and around Belvedere railway station.
- That our focus on holding community events and meetings in both these areas demonstrates that we believe this area to be one community.
- That some residents in the proposed Lower Belvedere ward may perceive a social division with the Belvedere Village, in other words, the residents of the Village being “better off”.
- It was suggested that some residents would feel wards are being created which artificially split their community facilities such as Belvedere Library and Belvedere Recreation Ground into a separate ward for no justifiable reason.
- That given that the council propose 13,000 new homes in Belvedere in the next ten years, that it looks unnatural that Belvedere will have one and two member wards while wards with hardly any new homes planned will be represented by three members. The specific concern being that these members in the one or two member wards could be overburdened by their planning caseload.
- That the other major issue for local residents will relate to the proposed Belvedere river crossing. Given the concerns being raised on this issue relate to increased road traffic on the three north to south routes (Heron Hill/St Augustine's Road, Picardy Road and Upper Park/Lower Park Road). It was queried whether the new bridge and associated traffic flows would matter to the boundaries in the context that it would flow into roads that fall within different wards.

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Some board members present supported the view that the proposed two-member Lower Belvedere ward and one-member Belvedere Village ward should be combined to form a three-member Belvedere ward.

However, we agreed that given the timescales until the close of the consultation that we would not be able to consult and take a sampled view of Belvedere residents by 4<sup>th</sup> April 2016, and that we could not supply a view that accurately represents a consultation undertaken of our members.

We have however shared your consultation via our email database and via our facebook page and twitter feed in order to encourage local residents to respond.

Although neither the board nor the Forum has an official or formal position on the boundary review we thought it appropriate that you consider the comments, opinions and questions that have arisen at our public meeting and our board meeting.

Given that we have not been able to undertake consultation to come to a settled conclusion on the comments that have been raised with us, we would ask that you take on board these views and any further responses you receive regarding boundary review in the Belvedere area.

Yours sincerely

Barry Leaf, Chairman Belvedere Community Forum